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ABSTRACT

This ERIC digest on a new curriculum project called "Teaching with Historic Places" discusses the program, its products, and how they can be used in classrooms and communities by students, teachers, and other interested groups. The program offers not only educational materials, but also professional training and development for teachers, museum educators, and site interpreters. Sponsored by the National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places and The National Trust for Historic Preservation and focusing on historic plans that document the past, the program uses the buildings, sites, districts, structures, and objects in local surroundings as documents of historical experiences and cultural expressions. This digest suggests that teachers can use historic places to enrich history, geography, and other subjects in the school curriculum, and to integrate instruction across a number of disciplines. At the heart of the "Teaching with Historic Places" program is a series of short lesson plans that are ready for use in the classroom. Each lesson uses a place listed in the National Register of Historic Places to teach a topic usually in the social studies curriculum. The focus of each lesson links a dramatic story of the place to larger themes and events in history. This program is a model for involving young people in researching, interpreting, and taking care of their community environment. It provides an easy-to-follow guide for developing lessons about places in the community. This digest includes information on the developers and distributors of the program materials. A list of references and ERIC resources is included. (DK)

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Teaching with Historic Places

by
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Teaching with Historic Places

by Kathleen Hunter

Our communities are classrooms waiting to be explored; they offer places that are continually shaped and reshaped by our historical experiences and cultural expressions. Some of these places document dramatic events, heroic deeds, creative and technical inventiveness, and the lives of extraordinary men and women. Others reflect the everyday events and patterns of ordinary people over time. Both types of places—the extraordinary and the ordinary—become a part of our local, state, and national heritage.

These kinds of historic places are focal points of a new curriculum project for schools sponsored by the National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places and The National Trust for Historic Preservation. These agencies have formed a partnership to offer a program of educational materials and professional training and development for teachers, museum educators, and site interpreters. This ERIC Digest discusses the *Teaching with Historic Places* program, its products, and how they can be used in classrooms and communities by students, teachers, and other interested groups.

Historic Places Document Our Past. *Teaching with Historic Places* uses the buildings, sites, districts, structures, and objects in our surroundings as documents of our historical experiences and cultural expressions. Teachers can use historic places to enrich history, geography, and other subjects in the school curriculum, and to integrate instruction across a number of disciplines. Students investigate and interpret the historical and cultural significance of places in their community.

The abstract concepts and broad issues they study in textbooks are transformed into tangible realities and intriguing stories about their everyday world. Students also can explore faraway places and discover the connections between these places and their own community. Schools, preservationists, museum and site interpreters, and others can work together to help their community appreciate its history and culture, and find ways to take care of places that have special meaning.

A Variety of Products and Services. At the heart of the *Teaching with Historic Places* program is a series of short lesson plans that are ready to use in the classroom. Each lesson uses a place listed in the National Register of Historic Places to teach a topic usually in the social studies curriculum, such as the westward movement, industrial revolution, urban development, and social reforms. The focus of each lesson links a dramatic story of the place to larger themes and events in history—integrating historical, cultural, environmental, technological, and aesthetic perspectives. In each lesson, learning objectives identify the basic ideas and cognitive skills students will learn and use. Students investigate written and visual evidence to determine the facts about the place and its story; then activities guide students in putting together the facts and forming conclusions about the information presented in the lesson. Each lesson plan invites teachers and students to explore places in their own community that relate to the lesson's theme. The lessons are suitable for students at different grade levels with different interests and abilities.

Other materials soon to be published include education kits that provide longer curriculum units. The kits use a number of places listed on the National Register of Historic Places to create a structured group of lessons. Each kit's theme is explored from various perspectives in lessons on different places. Students learn how cultural, geographic, social, and economic diversity influence history. The kits use readings and audio/visual materials to show how the theme is revealed through the arts, literature, and technological sciences, as well as history and the social sciences. A curriculum guide and other aids link individual lessons to each kit's theme. The lessons can be used to form a complete curriculum unit, or they can be interspersed with other units throughout the school year.

Teaching with Historic Places offers teachers, preservationists, and museum and site interpreters opportunities to participate in professional development and receive technical assistance to learn how to use historic places for educational purposes. Training emphasizes the importance of partnerships between communities and their schools for successful programs. Participants learn to identify and select evidence that will help them interpret the history and culture of their community or site. They use an inquiry approach to designing instructional materials and activities, and they are guided in constructing lesson plans that follow the *Teaching with Historic Places* format. A curriculum framework and technical assistance kit will be available soon to help schools of education, state education agencies, community organizations, and school districts use the *Teaching with Historic Places* approach in graduate courses, workshops, and curriculum development projects. Local and state leadership teams, including preservationists and educators, will be trained to use the materials and strategies of *Teaching with Historic Places.*

A Guide and Model for Locally Developed Programs. *Teaching with Historic Places* lessons can become part of a larger effort to interpret a community's history and culture for those who live and work there, and for visitors. This program is a model for involving young people in researching, interpreting, and taking care of their community environment. Understanding the importance of places to a community's heritage can influence planning for the community's future. Partnerships among teachers, students, and community and civic leaders can nurture creative approaches to working toward shared goals.

Teaching with Historic Places is an easy-to-follow guide for developing lessons about places in your community. First, contact the state historic preservation office or the National Register of Historic Places to identify the historic places in your community and obtain information on these places. Select a place that fits with a topic in the history or social studies curriculum taught in the school, such as the westward movement, World War I, or the Great Depression. Ask local historians, librarians, archivists, preservationists, and museum curators to help find additional

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information about the place selected, then prepare a lesson that could be used across several grades and subjects. Include these components in your lesson plan and teaching materials:

- A dramatic introduction that engages the interest of teachers and students and links the place to state, regional, and national history.
- Challenging objectives that strengthen students' critical thinking skills in an in-depth exploration of a place in their community.
- Written and visual evidence about the place that students can analyze to determine the facts.
- Learning activities that encourage students to "put it all together"—using the information they have gathered to interpret the significance of the place in their community's history and culture, and to generalize what they have learned to other places and other issues.

Developers and Distributors of the Program Materials. The program, *Teaching with Historic Places*, is co-directed by Carol Shull, Chief, National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service and Kathleen Hunter, Director of Education Initiatives at the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Staff include Beth Boland and Marilyn Harper, historians with the Park Service, and their associates, Deborah Page and Brenda Kelley.

The National Register of Historic Places is our nation's official list of cultural resources worthy of preservation. Authorized under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Register is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect our historic and archeological resources. The National Register is maintained by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. Over 61,000 properties are listed in the National Register. They include districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that are significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture. These resources contribute to an understanding of the historical and cultural foundations of the nation.

For information on the National Register for Historic Places, write: Carol Shull, National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; (202) 343-9536.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation was established by the Congress in 1949 as a non-profit organization. Its mission is to foster an appreciation of the diverse character and meaning of our American cultural heritage, and to preserve and revitalize the livability of our communities by leading the nation in saving America's historic environments. The Trust offers a wide range of educational programs through its national and regional offices and its eighteen historic properties. It works with more than 48,000 local and state preservation groups throughout the United States to interpret and protect their communities' historic and cultural resources. Support for the National Trust is provided by its 250,000 members, contributions, and a matching grant from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, under provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966.

For information on the Trust's programs and the communities they serve, write: Kathleen Hunter, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1785 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20036; (202) 673-4040. To order *Teaching with Historic Places* materials, call (800) 766-6847.

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